

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015FL282
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Name of Service:	Stepping Stones
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Address of Service:	Ardcath Road, Garristown, Co. Dublin
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Eircode:	A42 WC89
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Name of Registered Provider:	Eugenia Tormey
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date(s) of Inspection:	04/04/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	22	PM	No.
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, 181-189 Lakeshore Drive, Airside Business Park, Swords, Co. Dublin K67 Y5C6.
Inspection undertaken by:	AM Coyle
Title:	Early Years Inspector

Authority to Inspect

The Tusla Early Years Inspectorate carries out inspections of Early Years Services under Section 58(J) of the Child Care Act 1991 (as inserted by Section 92 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013).

Conditions if applicable	Not applicable.
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Description of service

Stepping stones is a privately owned early years service providing sessional preschool care and education to children aged from 2 to 6 years of age. The service caters for a maximum of 22 children Monday to Friday from 9am to 12 pm for 38 weeks of the year participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme. The preschool is located in a modular building adjacent to a private residence in a rural location on the outskirts of Garristown, north Co Dublin.

Staffing

The service employs 3 staff members including the registered provider who works directly with the children on a daily basis.

Methodology

Tusla's Early Years Inspectorate is the independent statutory regulator of early years services in Ireland. The Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 define the duty of a registered provider to ensure the safety and well-being of children and to comply with these regulations. This Act also gives Tusla the authority to assess compliance with the regulations. The purpose of regulation in relation to early years services is to ensure that the care, safety, and well-being of children attending such services is upheld. Inspections of early years services are planned based on the following:

- Previous inspection history
- Any information received in relation to the service

The findings on inspection are based on:

- Information obtained through examination of documentation
- Direct observation
- Discussion with relevant staff

This inspection was unannounced and focused on the area of governance/ health, welfare and development of child/ safety/ premises and facilities. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations 9,11,15,19, 23,25 and 26; however, on inspection additional non-compliance which posed a risk was identified under Regulation 16. These findings are outlined within the relevant regulations within this report.

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under regulation 15 – Record of pre-school child.

Inspection findings are documented in the inspection report which is first issued in draft format to the service with an opportunity to respond to any findings. Where statutory requirements are identified as not being met, the registered provider must demonstrate how they have rectified the non-compliance and will prevent any non-compliance from re occurring. The Corrective Action and Preventive Action plan (CAPA) will be used to inform decisions about compliance with regulatory requirements. Where the registered provider fails to meet the statutory requirements an escalation process may be commenced.

The inspectorate reserves the right to edit responses received for reasons including clarity, completeness and compliance with administrative and legal processes.

The contents of the report are compiled by the inspectorate body.

Acknowledgments

The inspector wishes to acknowledge the cooperation of the registered provider, staff and children who were present on the day of the inspection.

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 9 – Management and recruitment

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that-

- (a) the service has a designated person in charge and a named person who is able to deputise as required,
- (b) at all times during the period when the pre-school service is being carried on, the designated person in charge or the named person referred to in subparagraph (a) is on the premises, and

(2) A registered provider shall ensure that each employee, unpaid worker and contractor is suitable and competent taking into consideration the nature of the needs of children, including by-

- (a) consideration of references from the person's past employers, if any, and in particular the most recent employer, if any,
- (b) consideration of references from reputable sources in the case of a person who has no past employers,
- (c) consideration of the vetting disclosure received from the National Vetting Bureau of the Garda Síochána in accordance with the Act of 2012 in respect of the person, and
- (d) ensuring, insofar as is practicable, that where a person has lived in a state other than the State for a period of longer than 6 consecutive months, he or she provides police vetting from the police authorities in that state.

(4) A registered provider shall ensure that, without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (2) and subject to paragraphs (5) and (6), each employee working directly with children attending the service holds at least a major award in Early childhood Care and Education at Level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent.

Compliance Information

(1)(a) The registered provider was the designated person in charge of the service and there was a named person appointed to deputise as required.

(b) The registered provider was present and in charge of the service when the inspector arrived unannounced on the morning of the inspection and was present in the service for the duration of the inspection.

On the day of inspection, a total of 3 staff files, including the registered providers file and 2 staff members were reviewed.

(2)(a) One written reference was available for the registered provider. Three written validated references were available for 2 staff members.

(b) One written reference from a reputable source was available for the registered provider. One validated written reference from a reputable source was available for one staff member.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all 3 adults whose files were reviewed. The service demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d) International police vetting was available for 1 adult who had resided outside of the Irish jurisdiction for more than 6 consecutive months as an adult.

(4) Documentary evidence was available to confirm that 3 staff members whose files were reviewed and who work directly with children in the service held an appropriate childcare qualification at Level 5 or higher on the National Framework of Qualifications or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent.

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 11 - Staffing levels

(1) Subject to this Regulation, a registered provider shall ensure that there is at all times an adequate number of adults working directly with the children attending the pre-school service.

(3) Subject to paragraph (5), a registered provider of a sessional pre-school service shall ensure that at all times the minimum ratio of adults to children specified in column (3) of Part 2 of Schedule 6 opposite a particular reference number specified in column (1) of that Part in respect of the age range of the children specified in column (2) therefore at that reference number is satisfied.

(8) Without prejudice to paragraphs (2) to (7)-

(c) a registered provider of a sessional pre-school service shall ensure that, where the person in charge operates the service single-handedly, a second person familiar with the operation of the service and in a position to provide assistance to the person in charge in operating the service is, at all times, within close distance of the service and available to attend the service to assist the person in charge in the event of an emergency.

Compliance Information

(1) On the day of inspection there was an adequate number of staff members working directly with the children attending the service.

(3) The adult to child ratio was correct in the service when the inspector arrived unannounced and remained so throughout the inspection.

The following adult to child ratios were observed during the inspection:

- There were 22 pre-school children aged 3 years 5 months to 5 years being cared for by 2 staff members.

(8)(c) Not applicable as the service does not operate singlehandedly.

Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 15 – Record of pre-school child

(1) A registered provider of a pre-school service other than a pre-school service in a drop-in centre or a temporary pre-school service shall ensure that a record in writing is kept in respect of each pre-school child attending the service containing the following particulars:

- (a) the name and date of birth of the child;*
- (b) the date on which the child first attended the service;*
- (c) the date on which the child ceased to attend the service;*
- (d) the name and address of a parent or guardian of the child and a telephone number where that parent or guardian or a relative or friend of the child can be contacted during the hours of operation of the service;*
- (e) authorisation for the collection of the child;*
- (f) details of any illness, disability, allergy or special need of the child, together with all the information relevant to the provision of special care or attention;*
- (g) the name and telephone number of the child's registered medical practitioner;*
- (h) record of immunisations, if any, received by the child;*
- (i) written parental consent for appropriate medical treatment of the child in the event of an emergency.*

(3) A record in writing referred to in paragraph (1) or (2) shall be open to inspection on the premises by-

- (c) an authorised person.*

Compliance Information

(1) Twelve children's records were reviewed. The records contained the required information as set out in Regulation 15 (1) (a) to (i).

(3)(c) The records were available and open to inspection by the inspection, an authorised person.

Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 16 – Record in relation to pre-school service

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing is kept of the following information in relation to the service:

- (a) the name, position, qualifications and experience of the person in charge and of every other employee, unpaid worker and contractor;*
- (h) details of attendance by each pre-school child on a daily basis;*

Compliance Information

(1)(h) The children’s attendance was recorded on a daily basis in the service.

Non-Compliance Information

(1)(a) In respect of 2 staff members, there was no recorded history of past employment and relevant experience available for inspection. Therefore, it was not possible to determine whether international police vetting was required in accordance with Regulation 9(2)(c).

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective Action

(1)(a) Registered provider has obtained 2 Curriculum Vitae for the 2 staff members, which she now has filed away with all other necessary staff information.

Preventive Action

(1)(a) Registered provider will ensure all CVs are kept filed and up to date.

Supporting documentation submitted

Curriculum Vitae x 2

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions and evidence submitted. The noncompliance identified under regulation 16 – Record in relation to pre-school service has been adequately addressed.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 19 - Health, welfare and development of child

(1) A registered provider shall, in providing a pre-school service, ensure that-

(a) each child's learning, development and well-being is facilitated within the daily life of the pre-school service through the provision of the appropriate activities, interaction, materials and equipment, having regard to the age and stage of development of the child, and

Compliance Information

(1)(a) The following observations are examples on how each child's learning, development and well-being was observed being facilitated during the inspection:

Basic needs:

- There was a warm, welcoming and child centred atmosphere in the service as evidenced in the kind and supportive interactions observed taking place between the adults and the children.
- The children brought their morning snack with them from home. The staff members sat with the children while they ate chatting with the children and thus creating a calm and social atmosphere.
- The close proximity of the sanitary accommodation to the pre-school room facilitated the children who were able to use the toilet independently with assistance provided to the children when necessary.
- The children's choice was facilitated in the service. This was observed throughout the inspection as children were supported to follow their play interests with the staff members assisting the children to locate and set up their chosen play materials. On 2 occasions whilst a group of children engaged in a structured activity a number of children who chose not to participate were facilitated to engage in an alternative activity.
- The children spent time outdoors where they had access to a range of learning experiences and space to move, climb and run.

Supporting relationships around children:

- Both staff members in the service were observed to have warm and caring interactions with children, they spoke positively about the children and demonstrated familiarity with their needs and personalities and were observed to use play opportunities to engage children in one-to-one interactions engaging in natural reciprocal interactions.
- Both staff members were observed to work well together as a team, they supported each other in the care of the children modelling positive ways of interacting with the children and one another.

- The children's photographs and work were displayed in the care room, reflecting the children's identity, and encouraging children's sense of belonging in the service.
- Transitions were well supported in the service; verbal strategies were used by the staff members to inform and prepare children for up-coming activities and movement.

Physical and material environment:

- The play materials and equipment were displayed and readily accessible on low level shelving to promote the children's choice and independence when selecting their play activities. The children demonstrated familiarity with their environment to access the toys and play resources they chose to play with.
- The care room was spacious which enabled the children to move around freely and defined interest areas provided a range of developmentally appropriate play materials to support children's play and learning. The interest areas included home corners containing a range of resources for the children to extend their play including utensils in addition to dress up materials all of which facilitated the children's imaginary play experiences. Construction areas, transport toys, art resources and a broad range of tabletop materials were also available.
- The children's artwork was valued and displayed on the walls of the care rooms and the children's language development was enhanced through the provision of a wide range of books.
- A well-resourced outdoor area was available to the children. A treehouse with climbing steps and slides was positioned on a grassed area alongside a wooden boat which provided the children with the opportunity for physical play. A section of the garden was accessed via steps and part of this area was covered with rigid plastic roofing with a play kitchen, art easel and bench seating located underneath for the children to use. The concreted area to the front of the service enabled the children to use the wide range of ride on toys available, all of the children present on the day of inspection enjoyed time outside.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 23 - Safeguarding health, safety and welfare of child

A registered provider shall ensure that all reasonable measures are taken to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of a pre-school child attending the service and that the environment of the service is safe.

Compliance Information

General Safety:

- The external doors of the service were appropriately secured to prevent an unauthorised person from gaining access to the children and prevent children from exiting the premises unsupervised.
- The water temperature in the wash hand basins did not exceed the recommended maximum water temperature of 43°C. This reduced the risk of scalding for the children in attendance.
- Cleaning agents were stored out of the reach of children.

Infection Control:

- The children were facilitated to wash their hands before eating, after using the toilet and following messy play and outdoor play. There was running warm water, liquid soap and paper hand towels available for hand hygiene at the wash hand basins in the service.
- The equipment, play materials and facilities were in a clean and hygienic condition.

Administration of Medication:

- No children attending the service required a medical care plan. No medication was observed being administered on the day.

Safe Sleep:

- There were forms available to record the details of any medication administered should the need arise. No child required medication to be administered on the day of inspection.

Fire Safety:

- Emergency exits in the service were clear and unobstructed.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

1. The safety catch on the cupboard beneath the sink which contained cleaning products was broken. This increased the risk of children having access to hazardous materials.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective Action

General Safety:

1. Registered provider has replaced the safety catch on the cupboard beneath the sink.

Preventive Action

General Safety:

1. Registered provider will ensure a spare lock is kept on the premises so if one is damaged it can be replaced immediately.

Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety:

Photograph of cupboard with safety lock in place.

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions and evidence submitted. The noncompliance identified under regulation 23 - Safeguarding health, safety and welfare of child has been adequately addressed.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 25 - First aid

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that a person trained in first aid for children is, at all times, immediately available to the children attending the pre-school service.

(2) A registered provider shall ensure that a suitably equipped first aid box for children-

(a) is safely stored in an easily accessible and conspicuous position on the premises, and

(b) is available to the children attending the pre-school service at all times.

Compliance Information

(1) A person trained in first aid including first aid responder (FAR) training was immediately available to the children attending the pre-school service as evidenced in the in-date FAR certification provided for inspection.

(2)(a) and (b) The first aid box was suitably equipped and safely stored in readily accessible positions on the premises, out of the reach of children.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 26 - Fire safety measures

- (1) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing is kept of-
- (a) any fire drill that takes place in the premises, and
 - (b) the number, type and maintenance record of firefighting equipment and smoke alarms in the premises.
- (4) A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of fire shall be displayed in a conspicuous position in the premises.

Compliance Information

- (1)(a) Records were available in the service to demonstrate that regular fire drills take place. The most recent fire drill was recorded to have been carried out 11/03/25.
- (b) There was a record available that detailed the number, type and maintenance of the smoke alarms in the premises. The smoke alarm system was last serviced on 07/05/24.

Non-Compliance Information

- (b) An up-to-date record was not available for the maintenance of the fire extinguishers in the service.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective Action

- (b) The maintenance of the fire extinguisher has been completed.

Preventive Action

- (b) Registered provider has asked Northeast Fire to complete a yearly maintenance check, every March going forward.

Supporting documentation submitted

- Copy of fire extinguisher record maintenance certificate.

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions and evidence submitted. The noncompliance identified under regulation 26 - Fire safety measures has been adequately addressed.